

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

Issue 175

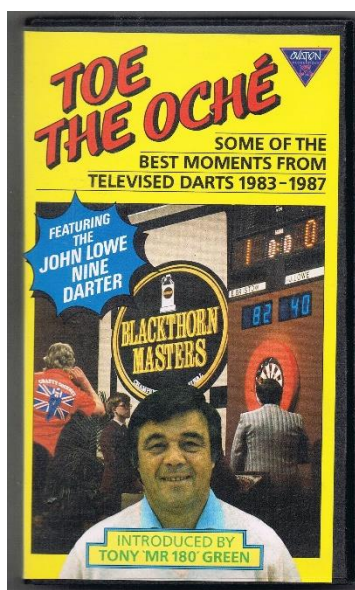
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October 2024



DO YOU REMEMBER 'TOE THE OCHE'?

A couple of months ago, I received an email out of the blue from John Plews (pictured below, right) who immediately brought back memories of those darts videos (VHS) that appeared during the late 1980s onwards.



In my archive I have *The John Lowe Way*, probably the first darts training video, then Eric Bristow's *Darts the Crafty Cockney Way* and others, including *Winning Darts* which featured international darts star and 4-times Canadian Masters Champion, Bob Sinnaeve. All such videos showed everything that a complete beginner or an experienced player needed to hone their skills. All were easy-to-follow, expert tuition. What else would you need?

Recently John Plews contacted me about what was, at the time, a unique video, *Toe The Oche*. (See left) John wrote:



'Hi Patrick. Firstly – found your website very interesting, and like yourself, I've been playing 'pub darts' all my adult life - I'm 76 and still playing!

I've also been organising my local league since 1984, along with a couple of other competitions over the years.

Just a bit more history...between 1985 and 2018 our company, Ovation, had a video division and because I played darts, knew Olly Croft, Dick Allix, John Raby, and a few other darting heroes, I supplied the cameras and screens for the audiences at BDO events. I was also involved in the 'live' version of the TV game show 'Bullseye'.

To the point of this email. In 1987 I produced a video for the take-home market "Toe the Oche."

[I remember it well John and still have a copy in my archive. I guess many *Darts History* readers will have too.]

It's a compilation of the best of eighties TV darts with Tony Green introducing the segments. I'm almost retired now and moving out of our offices.

THIS PROGRAMME FEATURES GAMES FROM THE FOLLOWING DARTS CHAMPIONSHIPS
EMBASSY WORLD PROFESSIONAL · 1983 · 1987
MFI WORLD MATCHPLAY · 1984 · 1985 · 1986
WINMAU WORLD MASTERS · 1985 · 1986
MFI WORLD PAIRS · 1987
DRY BLACKTHORN MASTERS · 1986 · 1987
□ □ □
FEATURING THE FOLLOWING INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS FROM ENGLAND
ERIC BRISTOW ○ JOHN LOWE ○ BOB ANDERSON
DAVE WHITCOMBE ○ KEITH DELLER ○ MIKE GREGORY
RITCHIE GARDNER ○ SONYA RALPHS ○ ALAN GLAZIER
CLIFF LAZARENKO
AND FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD
CERI MORGAN (Wales) ○ RAY FARRELL (N. Ireland)
CHRIS JOHNS (Wales) ○ STEVE BRENNAN (N. Ireland)
JOCKY WILSON (Scotland) ○ BOB SINNAEVE (Canada)
TERRY O'DEA (Australia) ○ RUSSELL STEWART (Australia)
LILLIAN BARNETT (New Zealand) ○ TONY PAYNE (USA)
PAUL LIM (Singapore)

I found the master tapes that were used to make 'Toe The Oche.' There are about 24 one-inch video tapes – a list of the tournaments can be found on one of the attached photos (See left, the back cover of the video which lists the tournaments covered and the darts players featured.) (it's the old VHS cover of the programme) – there's also pictures of the tape containers to give an idea of size. I have no room in my house for these tapes and before I throw them in a skip, I think they should go to a good home. Would you like them or do you know anyone who would?'

Would I like them? What a question to ask a Darts Historian! John tried the PDC and then asked Russ Bray and MC John McDonald but then found my website. John told me

'After the video was released back in 1987, we sold several thousand (VHS) through Woolworths and then via mail order with Tony Wood and Darts World.'

Although the material is one inch tape (the format of masters in the eighties) there are still transfer houses around if the tapes needed to be viewed. I'm not looking for any money (my copyright agreement has long since expired), I just think the tapes should be stored somewhere rather than ending up in a land fill site!

Let me know if you can help. Cheers.

John Plews - Director, Producer, and Darts enthusiast.'

To cut a long story short, John arrived at my house in July and delivered the tapes into my care. My wife, Maureen, was not particularly pleased with them being stacked in our hallway but that was only temporary. They are now stored away under the stairs!



What am I going to do with them? (Answer on a postcard please.) Surely such items deserve to be permanently stored as part of a Darts Museum and/or research archive.

John continued

'Patrick. Here's a bit of history of the making of "Toe The Oche".'

Having played darts for years, I had an interest in the game. Ovation, our video production company, was set-up in 1985 and had supplied screens and cameras for the audiences at several non-televvised BDO events.

Early in 1987 I realised there wasn't a darts compilation video on the market. It took a few months to negotiate the copyright fees with the various TV companies, then several weeks of what we call "off-line editing" to select the right clips, followed by me writing a linking script then a 'live shoot' with Tony Green in a south London studio that also included me throwing at the bull for the opening sequence - think I did it in three takes (no CGI in those days!) and a final edit in a West End editing studio in October 1987.

It was then duplicated on thousands of VHS tapes in time for the '87 Christmas market. Duplication was done in huge warehouses full of VHS machines which all had to be loaded with blank tapes manually then go into record mode together and the duplication was then done in real time. The Taunton Cider Company were the main sponsor of the programme hence the picture of the Blackthorn Masters on the front cover with Eric in his famous Crafty Cockney shirt.

However, I didn't realise until after I'd done the final edit that Eric appeared in seven of the clips but lost in six of them. Dick Allix (Eric Bristow's manager) was not pleased!!

The highlights of the programme were the John Lowe nine-darter and the Keith Deller 138 out-shot. Episode 2 of "Toe the Oche" was planned but for many reasons never happened [but] episode one remains a great record of televised darts in the eighties.'

Thanks John.

John has asked me to point that **'Toe the Oche' is no longer available** from Ovation and hasn't been for a good number of years. However, John did mention that

'There might be some copies on e-bay or the other second-hand sites, but I could only find one (on Amazon) at £40!!'

I thanked John for giving the tapes to me and into my care. But what will happen to them when I'm gone? Surely, they belong in a museum, like everything else from my archive and, especially, those from other serious collectors. I don't mean a virtual museum but a proper, hands-on museum, somewhere the thousands of darts fans can visit to learn (more) about the history of our great sport.

I have suggested this for years...

John subsequently subscribed to *Darts History* and immediately provided feedback on #174, the August issue. He wrote:

'Hi Patrick... Got the newsletter, excellent article about USA darts. My contribution to the American story is that I played darts in the late Seventies in a pub in Santa Monica. It was called The (Ye Olde) Kings Head and they had three boards, always busy. Lots of Brits living and working in LA used this place, they had leagues and I seem to remember it was quite well organised. Just looked at their website, the pub is still there but seems more of a restaurant. Not sure if they have the boards any longer but I'll be in LA next March - I'll call in and see if I can get a game!!

Cheers, John Plews'

John, we look forward to receiving your report next year...that is unless any of our US subscribers can provide any information about what John might expect to find. Drop me a line to patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com. Talking of the USA...

DARTS IN THE USA – MORE FEEDBACK

My article about darts in the USA (#174) seems to have been enjoyed by a good number of you and, in this case, encouraged Tom Lucason from Houston to sign up for *Darts History*.

“Hi Dr. Chaplin. I have been reading the last few issues of Darts History from the Winmau.com website and have enjoyed these immensely. I live here in Houston and have followed darts for over thirty years over here in the US.



May I congratulate you on your August issue of Darts History and the brilliant write up on darts stateside. I really enjoyed Mike Matthews take on the founding fathers of darts here in the US and agree with his comments entirely that we have been left a fantastic legacy for ‘Darts Players America’; not sure where darts would be in the US without those giants of the sport of darts from the past he mentioned.

A mention also to our own Rick Osgood who recently retired from Ricks Darts and Games here in Houston who also has done a great deal to promote darts in the US. As well as running his store, he and Loretta organised many, many darts tournaments and kept darts tournaments records. He actually was a friend of your English friend, Eddie Norman.

Rick was a wonderful darts guy who the USA darts fraternity will always be grateful to.”

Rick is shown above in his shop before he sold the business on 1st July 2023.

Just in case, I emailed Dr. Eddie Norman to check that he was aware that Rick had sold his business but I needn't have worried. Eddie wrote

“Good to hear from you Patrick. Yes, I knew Rick had sold up but thank you for letting me know it was kind of you. Rick and I go back a long way. Rick bought 350 copies from me of Leighton Rees book ‘On Darts’ which had been ghosted by Dave Lanning. My daughter and

her husband called in 18 months ago to say hello to Rick and Loretta for me as they were passing through Houston and Rick told them he was selling up.

I first visited Rick with [my wife] Anne many years ago, (Loretta, sadly, is in a wheelchair) and they are the nicest couple you would ever wish to meet. Big hearted genuine Americans.



Rick had a magnificent darts shop. It was huge. [See photo above, captioned 'One of the largest selections of darts & shafts anywhere! Thousands to choose from.']

He ran a darts column called [www. CyberDarts .com](http://www.CyberDarts.com). If you get a moment have a quick look. And he fed out darts information for tournaments he ran and kept everyone up with darts news.

We [Eddie and his brother Pete ran The House of Darts for many years] dealt with Rick and Loretta for many, many, years, and he told my daughter the darts business was not the same when House of Darts closed. He hated dealing with non-personal, big companies and missed the camaraderie of dealing with Pete and I."

Reader, Ben Sheppard contacted me a couple of months ago:

"Dear Patrick. Just finished August DH, a really great read thanks. Loved the feathers article a real eye opener. Never realised feathers was so big in darts. The USA darts article was a really great read amazing how people got darts off the ground in the USA, love reading about the early days of darts. Where would darts be today without these pioneers of the sport we love?

Would love to know when darts started in Holland and who started it seeing it is so big today. Have you ever covered this? Keep writing your wonderful magazine. Best..."

I replied,

"Hi Ben. Thanks for your email and your feedback on the August Darts History. I really appreciate it.

As for the beginnings of darts in Holland, I did undertake some research some years ago but, as far as I know, it was, for whatever reason, never published; possibly unfinished. I'll find some time soon to find my paperwork and see what I can retrieve.

As for feathers, they were massive in darts from the late 19th century until the 1970s, when 'plastic' flights took over, at roughly the same time that tungsten began to take over from brass."

PERSONAL MEMORIES OF JOE HITCHCOCK

I know that many *Darts History* readers are interested in hearing *any* stories relating to the 'Demon of the Dartboard,' Joe Hitchcock so here's my latest:

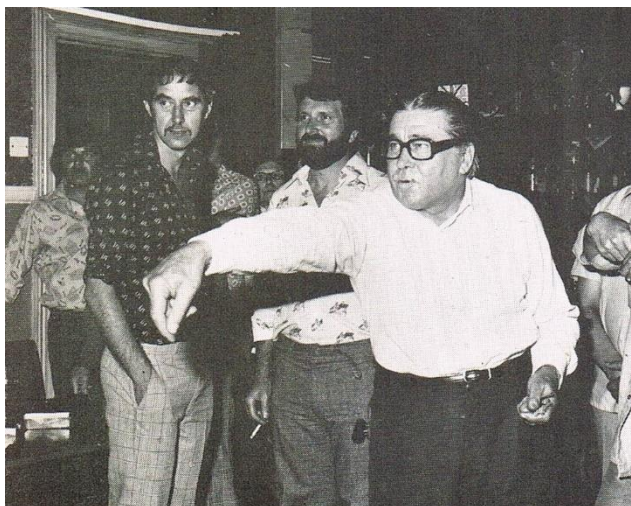
In August 2024, a lady named Jacqueline M. read *Darts History* online (available via both Red Dragon and WINMAU websites) and wrote:

“Hi just a quick piece of info. I went to an exhibition of Joe Hitchcock in 1967 at Thornton Lodge Bowling Club, Huddersfield. When I was buying my first pint at the bar the Steward informed my friend and I that Joe had already drunk five pints of beer. On the table beside the dartboard was two bottles of navy rum.”

Joe had quite a reputation for enjoying a nip and so this story seems to confirm...

“By 9 o’clock the first bottle was empty, and whilst taking on all-comers with darts and nails, he steadily consumed the other bottle. I was lucky enough to mark the last two games of the evening when he lost the last game throwing with nails despite, on his finish, having his last three nails bouncing out on double 16, each nail hitting the exact same spot in the double before bouncing out as I can testify.

I also helped Joe as a volunteer and he was a very kind quiet gentleman and very polite, thanking me afterwards. Despite the large amount of alcohol Joe had on board he never appeared to be drunk or unsteady, etc.



He was a great showman and did his exhibition unaided, apart from the navy rum. I am proud to have met the great man and seen him perform.”

(The photograph of Joe, above, right appeared in Harrows’ 1976 catalogue. © Harrows.)

THE LATE GREAT HARRY HEENAN

Stewart Blackmore, a visitor to my website on 24th August, shared the fact that he was friends with the legendary Scottish darts player Harry Heenan. (Pictured left.) For those unfamiliar with Harry’s life, check out my website at <https://patrickchaplin.com/2019/09/16/harry-heenan-the-pride-of-scotland/>. Stewart told me



Harry Heenan was a true legend and I was pleased to call him my friend.

In my younger days in Glasgow I was Catering Manager at Tiffany’s in Sauchiehall Street and always drank in The Glaswegian on my time off. Harry had a Blue Jag but didn’t have a driving license so I had the pleasure of driving him to exhibition matches, very rarely sober!

I also had the pleasure of meeting many Rangers [football] players who were allowed the odd pint in those

days and, also, Harry would take me to Jim Baxter's bar on the way to Ibrox on many an occasion.

I eventually moved to the Isle of Wight [circa 1976/77 when Stewart worked at the Westhill Manor Hotel, Shanklin] and, when Harry told me that he's never been there, [I] arranged for him to come down and play a few exhibition matches. He was over the moon and imagine my surprise when I went to pick him up from the ferry... when I saw Leighton Rees come off with him!

Yes, he'd brought Leighton as a 'guest' and we had a ball while they played in local pubs in Shanklin and Sandown. Great days. A true gent and good friend.

Have you any memories of befriending any legendary dart players? If so, please let me know and I will be happy to print any (printable) memories. Contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

A DARTBOARD OR NOT A DARTBOARD?

Some months ago, I received the following email from Canada which read:

'Found an old dartboard pressing mo[u]ld something similar copyright 1945 in our old family home I would like to know exactly what it is...copyright dartboard found when emptying my parent's house. This is a museum piece... We would like to sell that piece. Could you be of any help to suggest where I could sell it? Thank you.'

I have to admit that, at first, I assumed that it was a mould for a dartboard but the more I looked at it, the more... So, it came time to consult an expert and he wrote:

'This image shows a metal wagon wheel or hubcap from an old vehicle. It has a distinctive spoke pattern with red-coloured wood or wooden-like accents between the spokes, giving it a decorative, antique appearance.

The outer rim also has numbers etched into it, likely indicating some form of numbering system or markings related to its original automotive application.

This style of decorative wagon wheel hubcap was commonly used on vintage cars, trucks, or carriages from the early 20th century or earlier to evoke a rustic, pioneering, aesthetic.'

So not a dartboard at all then. You could have fooled me! What do you think?

LUKE LITTLER ON TV

This is probably the weakest title I have ever written for any item in *Darts History*.



Of course, Luke Littler, probably the next PDC World Champion, is ‘on TV’ all the time. But I’m wondering how many of us in the UK spotted Luke on BBC TV on Friday 4th October, on *Have I Got News For You*, looking over the left shoulder (as we look at the image), of team captain Ian Hislop.



I am sure that Luke has never been on the panel of HIGNFY but I am sure that, when ‘The Nuke’ became top news earlier this year I am certain that it would not have been long before he appeared on the pastiche board.

‘DARTS IS A FASCINATING GAME OF SKILL’

So said the *Daily Express* in its ‘Book of Popular Sports’ (circa 1936). I had been encouraged to investigate this volume following issue #173 in which I reported on a book (circa 1934) that Bob Anderson had discovered.

The *Daily Express* book continues by telling us that darts is ‘a test of hand and eye – which is within the means of all’ and explains that

‘Your real darts player gets a surprising amount of exercise out of playing, he walks a many a nine feet from the toe-line to the board during the course of an evening and the dart, the novice after thirty throws or more, becomes quite a heavy object and the muscles in the arm will ache next day.’

In the next issue of *Darts History* I will continue to examine the *Book of Sports*.

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